

# Dataset Analysis of English Texts Written on the Topic of Jesus' Resurrection: A Statistical Critique of Minimal Facts Apologetics

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**Abstract:** *This article collects and examines data relating to the authors of English-language texts written and published during the past 500 years on the subject of Jesus' resurrection and then compares this data to Gary R. Habermas' 2005 and 2012 publication on the subject. To date, there has been no such inquiry. This present article identifies 735 texts spanning five centuries (from approximately 1500 to 2020). The data reveals 680 Pro-Resurrection books by 601 authors (204 by ministers, 146 by priests, 249 by people associated with seminaries, 70 by laypersons, and 22 by women). This article also reveals that a remarkably high proportion of the English-language books written about Jesus' resurrection were by members of the clergy or people linked to seminaries, which means any so-called scholarly consensus on the subject of Jesus' resurrection is wildly inflated due to a biased sample of authors who have a professional and personal interest in the subject matter. Pro-Resurrection authors outnumber Contra-Resurrection authors by a factor of about twelve-to-one. In contrast, the 55 Contra-Resurrection books, representing 7.48% of the total 735 books, were by 42 authors (28 having no relevant degrees at the time of publication). The 42 contra authors represent only 6.99% of all authors writing on the subject.*

**Keywords:** Resurrection, Gary R. Habermas, Minimal Facts, Historical Jesus, Apologetics

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## Introduction

Glenn Siniscalchi is currently an assistant professor of theology at Notre Dame College, South Bend, Ohio. He made the following observation in a 2019 book review that appeared in the *Catholic Biblical Quarterly*: “One of the common objections to the reliability of the Gospels is that they were written by committed believers whose bias prevented them from telling us the truth about Jesus. Apparently, the weight of this objection is only

compounded by the fact that most scholars of the historical Jesus are influenced by ecclesiastical presuppositions.”<sup>1</sup>

Is this objection a fair one? The present article will focus on examining the ecclesiastical affiliation of book authors writing on the topic of Jesus’ resurrection. To date, there has been no previous publications on the topic. A review of several pertinent writings serves as a springboard for this research.

In recent years, several Christian apologists (most notably, Gary R. Habermas) have claimed that a solid majority (about 75%) of scholars who have published books or articles on the subject of Jesus’ resurrection accept the historicity of the empty tomb. Surprisingly, this present article reveals that if we examine the authors who have published books in English on the topic of Jesus’ resurrection, the 75% figure is, if anything, an underestimate. At first sight, this finding may seem to support the Christian apologist’s claim of a solid scholarly consensus in favor of the empty tomb and Jesus’ resurrection.

Digging deeper, however, a different picture emerges. This present article reveals that a remarkably high proportion of the English-language books written about Jesus’ resurrection were by members of the clergy or people linked to seminaries, which means any so-called scholarly consensus on the subject of Jesus’ resurrection is wildly inflated due to a biased sample of authors who have a professional and personal interest in the subject matter. Moreover, those Pro-Resurrection authors outnumber Contra-Resurrection authors by a factor of about twelve-to-one. In other words, most scholarly books written on the resurrection are by committed Christians, and we may legitimately presume that most of them already accepted the historicity of Jesus’ resurrection long before they became scholars.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, apologist Gregory Koukl admits that most apologists first came to faith through personal experiences, not evidence.<sup>3</sup>

Since belief in the empty tomb is a central tenet of orthodox Christian belief, it is fair to conclude that most scholars who believe Jesus’ tomb was empty on Easter Sunday were likely raised with this belief. Their acceptance of

<sup>1</sup> Siniscalchi, “Jewish Scholarship on the Resurrection,” 742–43.

<sup>2</sup> This is, in fact, the case with apologist Gary Habermas, who regularly shares stories with his students about being a committed Christian in his youth long before obtaining a college degree. As fellow apologist John Frame once observed, “Habermas in the end presupposes a Christian view of evidence and probability” (Frame, “A Presuppositionalist’s Response,” 137).

<sup>3</sup> Koukl, *Tactics*, 55. Tony Campolo also confesses, “My apologetic, I explained, was determined by an *a priori* commitment. I believed first, then constructed arguments to support what I believed....In the end, isn’t what we believe more highly contingent upon decisions we make rather than on empirical evidence?” (McLaren and Campolo, *Adventures in Missing the Point*, 108).

the empty tomb is a pre-critical one.<sup>4</sup> That said, this essay does *not* wish to assert that a Christian scholar cannot write an objective and critical text on the topic of Jesus' resurrection.<sup>5</sup> This article simply argues that authors who have a pre-critical belief in the resurrection do not represent a consensus of scholars. Hence, the widely circulated claim that academic consensus reaches 75% supporting the empty tomb (or 90% for other so-called "minimal facts") is invalid. The present article concludes with a recommendation of its own.

### Aim of the Research

This article aims to collect and examine data relating to the authors of English-language texts written and published during the past 500 years on the subject of Jesus' resurrection and compare this data to that reported in a 2005 *Journal for the Study of the Historical Jesus* article and an updated 2012 work by Habermas. In order to be counted, the book was required to be a minimum of at least forty-eight pages. Categories of data investigated about each author include (1) religious denomination; (2) level of education; (3) occupation; (4) degree of expertise (professional or layperson); and (5) gender.

### Review of the Literature

Gary R. Habermas is the Distinguished Research Professor of Apologetics and Philosophy, as well as Chairman of the Department of Philosophy, at Liberty University in Lynchburg, Virginia. He is perhaps one of the world's foremost authorities on the topic of Jesus' resurrection. In 2005, Habermas published a highly significant review article titled, "Resurrection from 1975 to the Present: What are Critical Scholars Saying."<sup>6</sup> In its introduction, the article states: "Since 1975, well over 2000 scholarly publications on the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus have appeared. Over the last five years, I have tracked these texts, which were written in German, French and English. Well over 100 subtopics are addressed in the literature, almost all of which I have examined in detail."

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<sup>4</sup> Of course, this pre-critical factor is a reality for many who reject the empty tomb and resurrection, as well. That is, before some of these contra authors wrote their texts, they had already decided the resurrection did *not* happen. In many other cases, though, scholars who now reject the resurrection (Bart Ehrman, David Kyle Johnson, David Madison, and Darren M. Slade, just to name a few) were once staunch orthodox Christian believers.

<sup>5</sup> See for example, Allison, *The Resurrection of Jesus*.

<sup>6</sup> Habermas, "Resurrection from 1975 to the Present," 135–53.

In 2010, resurrection scholar Michael R. Licona published the highly acclaimed, modified version of his Ph.D. dissertation, *The Resurrection of Jesus: A New Historiographical Approach*. In Licona's introduction, he wrote, "Habermas has compiled a massive bibliography consisting of approximately 3,400 scholarly journal articles and books written in English, German and French between 1975 through the present, all on the subject of the historicity of Jesus' resurrection."<sup>7</sup> Habermas's list grew by approximately 1,400 articles and books in the five years after his 2005 article was first published.

Two years later, the *Southeastern Theological Review* (Summer 2012) devoted an extensive portion of its issue to the topic of Jesus' resurrection. In one article, "The Minimal Facts Approach to the Resurrection of Jesus," Habermas further clarified and illuminated the nature of his research. Key points identified in the article appear in **bold print**:

From the outset of my studies, I argued that there were at least two major prerequisites for an occurrence to be designated as a Minimal Fact. Each event had to be established by more than adequate scholarly evidence, and usually by several critically-ascertained, independent lines of argumentation. **Additionally, the vast majority of contemporary scholars in relevant fields had to acknowledge the historicity of the occurrence.** Of the two criteria, I have always held that the first is by far the most crucial, especially since this initial requirement is the one that actually establishes the historicity of the event. Besides, the acclamation of scholarly opinion may be mistaken or it could change....

Regarding my references to the vast majority or virtually all scholars who agree, is it possible to identify these phrases in more precise terms? At least when referencing the most important historical occurrences, I frequently think in terms of a **ninety-something percentile head-count**. No doubt, this is one of the reasons why the concept has gained some attention....

Where are most scholars and *why*, precisely, are they there?

To answer this question in my case, what began as a rather modest attempt to update my resurrection bibliography grew by large increments until it developed into a full-blown attempt to catalog an overview of recent scholarship. The study dominated five straight years of my research time, as well as long intermittent stretches after that. Apparently, I was not very successful at drawing boundaries! I pursued an ongoing study that classified

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<sup>7</sup> Licona, *The Resurrection of Jesus*, 19.

at least the major publications on these topics, continuing on through other representative sources. **I counted a very wide spectrum of scholarly views**, tracing the responses to about 140 sub-issues or questions related to the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus. My bibliography is presently at about 3400 sources and counting, published originally in French, German, or English.

**Initially I read and catalogued the majority of these publications, charting the representative authors, positions, topics, and so on, concentrating on both well-known and obscure writers alike, across the entire skeptical to liberal to conservative spectrum.** As the number of sources grew, I moved more broadly into this research, trying to keep up with the current state of resurrection research.

I endeavored to be more than fair to all the positions. **In fact, if anything, I erred in the direction of cataloguing the most radical positions, since this was the *only* classification where I included even those authors who did not have specialized scholarly credentials or peer-reviewed publications.** It is this group, too, that often tends to doubt or deny that Jesus ever existed. Yet, given that I counted many sources in this category, **this means that my study is skewed in the skeptical direction far more than if I had stayed strictly with my requirement of citing only those with scholarly credentials.** Still, I included these positions quite liberally, even when the wide majority of mainline scholars, “liberals” included, rarely even footnoted this material. Of course, this practice would also skew the numbers who proposed naturalistic theories of the resurrection, to which I particularly gravitated.

The result of all these years of study is a private manuscript of more than 600 pages that simply does little more than line up the scholarly positions and details on these 140 key questions, without additional interaction or critique. **Most of this material is unpublished**, though I have released some of the results in essays that specifically attempt to provide overviews of some of these current academic positions.<sup>8</sup>

The reader will note that Habermas listed *two* criteria for designating an event relating to Jesus’ death and resurrection as a minimal fact: (1) the event is well-evidenced (usually for a number of reasons); and (2) the event is generally believed to have occurred by at least 90% of “critical scholars.” This article will take no issue with Habermas’s first criterion, only with his second.

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<sup>8</sup> Habermas, “The Minimal Facts Approach to the Resurrection of Jesus,” 16–18.

Briefly stated, Habermas's research fails to satisfy his second criterion and, further, the standard itself needs to be modified to distinguish between a scholar's pre-conceived beliefs about Jesus and their subsequent opinions resulting from academic research.<sup>9</sup>

As it turns out, Habermas's 2012 article has been widely influential—in particular, its allusion to a bibliography of “3400 sources.” Citations that mention Habermas's 3,400 references have appeared in various texts, journals, online articles, and podcasts. Textual references include the works of Andrew Ter Ern Loke, Brian K. Morley, William A. Dembski and Michael R. Licona, Benjamin C. Shaw, and Robert B. Stewart.<sup>10</sup>

### Relevance of Habermas's Data

Expounding the significance of his research, Habermas found that about three-quarters (or 75%) of the scholars he surveyed adopted a “moderate conservative position” on the historicity of Jesus' empty tomb. That number is open to doubt, as he himself admits:<sup>11</sup>

A rough estimate of the publications in my study of Jesus' resurrection among British, French, and German authors (as well as a number of authors from several other countries), published during the last 25 years or so, indicates that there is approximately a 3:1 ratio of works that fall into the category that we have dubbed the moderate conservative position, as compared to more skeptical treatments. **Of course, this proves nothing concerning whether or not the resurrection actually occurred.** But it does provide perhaps a hint—a barometer, albeit quite an unofficial one, on where many of these publications stand.

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<sup>9</sup> Habermas himself has stated that being criticized for his obstinate ideological dogmatism is simply part of the persecution that all true Christians should expect. When confronted with the notion that the “minimal facts” tactic can only compile data and that it is his religious ideology interpreting the data in favor of Christianity, Habermas agreed. He simply concluded that everyone engages in a confirmation bias (Habermas, “APOL 900,” May 26, 2016).

<sup>10</sup> See Loke, *Investigating the Resurrection of Jesus Christ*, 1; Morley, *Mapping Apologetics*, 339n30; Dembski and Licona, eds., *Evidence for God*, 177; Shaw, “Philosophy of History, Historical Jesus Studies, and Miracles, 61–80; and Stewart, “On Habermas's Minimal Facts Argument,” 1–14. In contrast, Michael J. Alter's forthcoming text, *The Resurrection and Its Apologetics: A Critical Inquiry Vol. 1* strongly challenges the Minimal Facts approach to Jesus' resurrection.

<sup>11</sup> Interestingly, Habermas has stated in class lectures that he does not feel comfortable using the empty tomb as a “minimal fact” because only 60–75% of scholars agree that Jesus' tomb was actually empty (Habermas, “APOL 920,” February 15, 2017).

By far, the majority of publications on the subject of Jesus' death and resurrection have been written by North American authors. Interestingly, my study of these works also indicates an approximate ratio of 3:1 of moderate conservative to skeptical publications, as well as the European publications. Here again, this signals the direction of current research.<sup>12</sup>

Significantly for apologists, the greater the number of identified sources, the greater the credibility of the arguments in favor of Jesus' resurrection.

### The Critics

Detractors have criticized Habermas's Minimal Facts Approach and the accompanying report of 3,400 references. For instance, Richard Carrier, a prominent nontheist, specifically criticized the reference to Habermas's sources reported in the June 2005 article cited above, highlighting what he perceived as several failures in Habermas's methodology, including sample bias, the absence of a true consensus, and the exclusion of scholars with no firm opinions on the historicity of the resurrection:

There it is revealed that it is not 75% "of scholars," but 75% *of writers* (regardless of qualifications) *who have published articles arguing specifically for or against the empty tomb* (he never gives an actual count that I know of). But those who publish on a specific issue do not represent a random sample but could very well represent a biased sample (the more so when you include authors with no relevant qualifications), and so there is no way to assess *the actual percentage of relevant scholars in the field* who share those published conclusions. You would need a scientifically controlled randomized poll of verified experts. He hasn't done that.<sup>13</sup>

The criticisms raised by Carrier are certainly telling ones. Even fellow apologist John Frame remarked, "Habermas overestimates the agreement among Bible critics as to the 'minimal facts of Christianity' and the general reliability of the resurrection accounts in Scripture."<sup>14</sup> Despite these remarks, detractors have not attempted to survey the scholarly literature or quantify the extent of the methodological flaws they have identified. As such, research into this topic has only partially rectified that omission.

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<sup>12</sup> Habermas, "Resurrection Research from 1975," 139–40.

<sup>13</sup> Carrier, "Innumeracy: A Fault to Fix."

<sup>14</sup> Frame, "A Presuppositionalist's Response," 132.

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Research by Michael J. Alter

In 2020, Michael J. Alter published *A Thematic Access-Oriented Bibliography of Jesus's Resurrection*, which was endorsed by Gary R. Habermas and Gerald O'Collins SJ. The 602-page text organized approximately 7,000 English-language book sources into twelve main categories and thirty-four subcategories. A substantial portion of the data is from Alter's 2015 work, *The Resurrection: A Critical Inquiry*.

Subcategories 1 and 2 in Alter's 2020 text are the primary foil for this study: (1) Entire Books Dealing with Jesus' Resurrection: Pro and (2) Entire Books Dealing with Jesus' Resurrection: Con. Alter's working definition of a "book" is a text of forty-eight or more pages in length. In subcategory 2, Alter employed a "loose" working definition of the term "con," which includes authors ranging from atheists to agnostics, skeptics, humanists, rationalists, secular liberals, and even some Christian theists. Often, these authors are highly critical of the evidence supporting Jesus' resurrection and, in particular, the resurrection narratives. In a few cases, their opinion was difficult, if not impossible, to identify.

Most information organizing Alter's bibliography was through the Library of Congress (LoC) call numbers. Noteworthy were numbers BT480-500 and 520. However, many older texts, self-published works, and texts located in libraries both inside and outside the United States lack an LoC (Library of Congress) call number. Consequently, WorldCat and additional databases were employed to cast a wider net for texts dealing with this topic.<sup>15</sup>

### Investigative Obstacles, Presuppositions, and Methodology

Before analyzing the 2020 bibliography, Alter reexamined approximately 700 sources in subcategories 1 and 2. The purpose of the reexamination was to determine texts for removal from his original list. Also added to the original list were twenty-two newly published sources.

#### *Investigative obstacles*

An exhaustive list of all texts ever written about Jesus' resurrection would consist of sources written in *all* languages, in *all* locales, and at *any* time

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<sup>15</sup> Alter, *A Thematic Access-Oriented Bibliography*, xiii–xiv.



since the birth of Christianity. However, due to time constraints, geography, accessibility, and limited research resources, an alternative was required to narrow the search. Consequently, this investigation only incorporates a nearly-complete data set of English-language texts. Arranged in two clusters are Pro-Resurrection and Contra-Resurrection. These authors, in turn, are sorted into (1) religious denomination; (2) level of education; (3) occupation; (4) degree of expertise (professional or layperson); and (5) gender.

### *Organization*

As mentioned previously, Alter employed thirty-four subcategories of which the first two will be the primary focus of this investigation. Dealing with the obstacles that Habermas discussed, only four variables were adopted: (1) author's name and date of birth or date of death; (2) year of the published work(s); (3) identification of (a) the degree(s) earned by the author, (b) the specific discipline(s) that the degree(s) related to (e.g., apologetics, history, ministry, philosophy, etc.), (c) the institution obtained from, and (d) whether the author was a layperson or a scholar; and (4) a brief overview of the author's (a) nationality, (b) religion, and (c) occupation (e.g., bishop, evangelist, minister, priest, professor, etc.).<sup>16</sup> This information was primarily, although not exclusively, gathered through eight sources: (1) the book(s) written by the author; (2) the publisher; (3) the author's curriculum vitae; (4) published biographies; (5) encyclopedias; (6) the Library of Congress Name Authority File (NAF); (7) LinkedIn; and (8) obituary notices.

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<sup>16</sup> See Table 1 below for a sample excerpt.

Table 1: Sample excerpt from Alter’s 2020 research (modified)

	Name	Year of Publication(s)	Degree	Occupation
61	Gunter, W. Stephen (1947–)	1999	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• MDiv (Nazarene Theological Seminary)</li> <li>• PhD (University of Leiden, the Netherlands)</li> </ul>	Professor Emeritus of Evangelism and Wesleyan Studies at Duke University.
62	Gurney, T. A. (1856–1929)	1930	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• MA</li> <li>• LLB</li> </ul>	Vicar of Bishop’s Nympton, N. Devon.
63	Habermas, Gary R. (1950–)	1987, 1989, 2000a, 2000b, 2003, 2004, 2005	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• MA in philosophical theology (University of Detroit)</li> <li>• PhD in history and philosophy of religion (Michigan State University)</li> </ul>	Habermas is an American historian and Distinguished Research Professor and chair of the department of philosophy and theology at Liberty University.

Source: Alter, *A Thematic Access-Oriented Bibliography*, 17.

*Scope and Limits of the Study: Inclusions and Exclusions*

This study is limited to books (at least forty-eight pages in length), written exclusively in English, and which have been penned primarily within the past five centuries.<sup>17</sup> One additional limitation was the lack of information about several authors.

<sup>17</sup> The search was limited deliberately to the English language for five major reasons. First, from Alter’s text, a healthy amount of data from approximately 700 texts was easily accessible. In contrast, Habermas’s total of 3,400 sources included journal articles. Second, Habermas has never provided data detailing precisely how many texts (not articles) he analyzed were exclusively English, meaning the number of non-English texts may not have been statistically significant. Third, it is noteworthy that Habermas said, “By far, the majority of

## Data Findings

This section will divide the data findings into two main categories: Pro and Contra. The purpose of this division is to facilitate the examination of the data. However, the existence of more nuanced groupings is acknowledged.

### *Data findings: Pro-Resurrection*

Altogether, Alter's research identified 601 authors and 680 works in this subcategory. Several authors had more than one published text. Father Gerald O'Collins, a Jesuit priest, wrote the most texts on the subject (nine), followed by Gary R. Habermas and Josh McDowell (seven each), William Lane Craig (six), and Marcus L. Loane (five).

Seventy (11.65%) of the 601 Pro-Resurrection authors were classified as laypersons. Altogether they wrote eighty-two texts (12.06%) of the 680 Pro-Resurrection works. Presumably, if several unidentified authors could be known and included in the count, the number and percentage would increase. Several examples of laity (without a degree relating to the subject) include the following: (1) business people; (2) educators; (3) lawyers; and (4) writers. A review of Alter's bibliography also identified only twenty-two female authors (3.7%) in the Pro-Resurrection category.<sup>18</sup> Moreover, thirty-two (4.7%) of the 680 texts were translations.

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publications on the subject of Jesus' death and resurrection have been written by North American authors"; thus, presumably in the English language. Of note, thirty-two pro and only four con books in Alter's bibliography were English translations from other languages. Fourth, if this study incorporated non-English texts, there would be the question of which languages would be subject to exclusion and for what reason. Significantly, including only French and German titles (as Habermas does) while excluding Arabic would skew the data since Islam rejects the historicity of Jesus' crucifixion. Moreover, it is noteworthy that Habermas excludes other languages like Korean, Chinese, and Spanish. How can he claim that "most scholars" agree on a minimal fact if "most" scholars are actually excluded from his list? Five, although limited to the English language, this data is not of limited value because it exposes serious defects in Habermas' apologetic methodology. Of course, the implications of this study should be subject to further investigation. Specifically, future research should build on this paper and investigate findings in non-English language texts, as well as journal articles. Collectively, they would present researchers with deeper insight into the writers of texts on this critical topic.

<sup>18</sup> (1) Margaret Barker; (2) Madame Cecilia; (3) Elizabeth Rundle Charles (E. Bowerman); (4) Pamela Binnings Ewen; (5) Mary Ford-Grabowsky; (6) Paula Gooder; (7) Mary C. Grey; (8) Jean Hall; (9) Gertrude Hollis; (10) Sarah Hornsby; (11) Jo Kadlecsek; (12) Anna D. Kartsonis; (13) Kathy Newell Kirkpatrick; (14) Sophia L. Little; (15) Megan McKenna; (16) Lidija Novakovic; (17) PHEME Perkins; (18) Velna N. Ruch; (19) Marianne Sawicki; (20) Sandra Marie Schneiders; (21) Elizabeth Warren; and (22) Ellen Gould Harmon White.

Also examined were the religious denomination and clerical status of the authors. These variables presented numerous obstacles to arriving at an accurate tabulation. For example, several authors changed their denominational affiliation while overall categorization was difficult, if not impossible, for others. Further complicating matters, some members of the clergy employed various terms for their occupation. Often, this fact made it impossible to determine their denomination accurately. Table 2 summarizes the findings. However, the data may be subject to future modification.

Table 2. Pro-Resurrection authors, categorized by denomination and employment in higher education (Note: As these categories overlap, they do not add up to 601)

Category	Number	% of 601 Authors
Ministers, Pastors, and Reverends	206	34.28%
Priests, Catholic (including bishops, archbishops, and popes)	65	10.81%
Priests, Anglican (including bishops and archbishops)	83	13.81%
Seminaries, theological centers, colleges, and universities	265	44.1%
Anglicans	100	16.6%
Catholics	75	12.5%
Protestants (Baptists, Brethren, Church of Latter-day Saints, Mennonites, Methodists, Presbyterians, Seventh-day Adventists, Unitarians, etc.)	234	39.0%

*Data findings: Contra-Resurrection*

This section examines data from sources categorized as Contra-Resurrection.<sup>19</sup> In total, Alter's text identified forty-two authors who had published fifty-five works in this subcategory. Several authors have published more than one text, namely three authors wrote two books, two authors wrote three books, and one author wrote five books. Peter Annett (1693–1769), the most dated author, published five texts. Gerd Lüdemann and Robert M. Price each published three texts.

Fourteen of the forty-two authors (33.33% of the total list of Contra-Resurrection authors) had graduate degrees in related or partially related fields. Three authors employed pseudonyms (Unitheist, Berna, and Sandoval, though there was information on the latter two). Only two of the forty-two authors were women. Furthermore, four of the fifty-five books were translations.

Twenty-eight authors categorized as laypersons published thirty-three works. These laypersons represented 66.67% of the total number of Contra-Resurrection authors, who published 60% of the fifty-five Contra-Resurrection texts. Examples of laity (without a degree relating to the subject) include (1) educators; (2) lawyers and judges; and (3) writers. This subcategory (contra), when applied fairly broadly, included atheists, agnostics, detractors, humanists, rationalists, skeptics, liberal Christians, and even some Catholic, Protestant, and Jewish writers. Significantly, several of the contra authors were, in fact, former Christians, including ministers and priests. Eventually, several of them, in fact, "deconverted" to non-theism. Since many of these authors changed their denominational affiliation or were unknown, categorization was difficult.

Three authors were unidentified. They represented 7.1% of the forty-two authors. A search of their texts and previously mentioned potential sources of information failed to uncover any biographical details for these authors.

Table 3 presents an examination of the contra authors' religious denominations and clerical status. These variables provide many obstacles to achieving accurate tabulation. Several authors changed their denominational affiliation while others remained uncategorized. Table 3 summarizes these findings. However, the data may be subject to future revisions.

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<sup>19</sup> Again, it is crucial to note that not all of these writers are non-Christians, nor do they reject Jesus' resurrection altogether.

Table 3. Contra-Resurrection authors, categorized by denomination and employment in higher education (Note: As these categories overlap, they do not add up to 42)

Category	Number	% of 42 Authors
Agnostic, Deist, Freethinker, Rationalist, Secular	5	11.9%
Atheist	3	7.1%
Anglican (Church of England), Episcopalian	3	7.1%
Catholic	2	4.8%
Christian (Protestant)	5	11.9%
Hebrew-Christian	1	2.3%
Jewish	4	9.5%
Renounced Catholicism/Christianity	4	9.5%
Unitarian	1	2.3%
Unknown	14	33.3%
Seminaries, theological centers, colleges, and universities	7	16.6%
Ministers, Pastors, and Reverends	7	16.6%
Priest (Catholic)	1	2.3%
Episcopalian Bishop	1	2.3%

About 735 English-language texts (680 pro + fifty-five contra) have been written during the past 500 years on the topic of Jesus' resurrection.<sup>20</sup> The fifty-five Contra-Resurrection books accounted for only 7.48% of all published books. Of the 680 "pro" books, 334 (49.12%) were before 1975. Of the fifty-five "contra" texts, eighteen (32.73%) pre-dated 1975. Of the 643 authors who have written entire books on Jesus' resurrection, 601 were Pro-Resurrection. In contrast, only forty-two (just 6.53% of all the authors surveyed) were Contra-Resurrection.

### Areas of Controversy: Who Counts as a Scholar?

To be categorized as a "scholar" in the field, an obvious problem is relevant qualifications. In 2017, one reader asked Bart Ehrman, Can biblical scholars be historians? His response was, "I would say that most biblical

<sup>20</sup> For the list of books, see Alter, *A Thematic Access-Oriented Bibliography*, 3–46.

scholars in fact are not historians. But some are. It depends on what their interests and expertise are.”<sup>21</sup>

The survey of 601 Pro-Resurrection authors is instructive in this regard. In many cases, the earned degrees are without further elaboration. For example, if someone possesses a graduate degree, oftentimes a field of study is not specified nor is the dissertation identified. In several instances, the author had a “doctorate,” but the degree is merely an honorary title.<sup>22</sup> Adding to the confusion, many dated authors (pre-1950) had ambiguous or outdated abbreviations for their degree(s). Further compounding this perplexity, the Vatican issues numerous post-nominal letters (e.g., OSB, OFM, SJ).

Another problem with these degrees is that there is usually no means to determine the prerequisites for admission. The amount or type of work required to complete their course work is unknown. What’s more, the program of the degree-granting educational institution is unknown.

An assisting tool originally was the “Guide to Educational and Degree Program Standards Relettering,” which has since been updated. The Association for Theological Schools (ATS), an organization with over 270 institutions, is its publisher. Their most recent information is available online.<sup>23</sup>

### **Why Believers Publish the Most Texts on Jesus’ Resurrection**

The data in this article confirms that most “critical scholars” who study the historicity of Jesus’ resurrection are not only Christians, they are also apologists, evangelists, ministers, priests, and seminary administrators or instructors.<sup>24</sup> This finding suggests that people with a vested interest in

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<sup>21</sup> Ehrman. “Can Biblical Scholars Be Historians?”

<sup>22</sup> Such as Horace M. Du Bose, Curtis Hutson, Greg Laurie, A.A. Lipscomb, Lee Strobel, and Warren Wiersbe. These writers are in good company. For example, Lewis Sperry Chafer, founder and president of Dallas Theological Seminary, and the author of his eight-volume Systematic Theology, only received three honorary degrees, one that he gave to himself.

<sup>23</sup> “Standards of Accreditation.”

<sup>24</sup> The term “critical scholar” is typically used in opposition to a “confessional scholar” (someone who conducts their research from a faith-based presupposition rather than from a “critical” or “objective” basis). For Habermas, however, a “critical scholar” is someone who studies in the relevant field, possesses a doctoral degree, is a professor, and is published in a peer-reviewed, non-consenting (i.e., a non-conservative, non-evangelical) publication (see Habermas, “APOL 910-397” and “Evidential Apologetics,” 100–20). In this sense, Habermas seems to equivocate the *methodology* of critical scholarship with someone’s professional circumstances. Of course, a published professor possessing a doctoral degree in a relevant field of study does not alone qualify someone as engaging in *critical* scholarship. Interestingly, as shown in this study,

defending the death and resurrection of Jesus are more likely to publish texts about these topics than skeptics or detractors. Why might this be the case? There are many possible reasons, but two are especially pertinent. First, Pro-Resurrection authors are “true believers.” They are sincere in their efforts to fulfill the Great Commission (Matt. 28:16–20) and convince the world that Jesus really did raise from the dead. Without this resurrection belief, according to the Apostle Paul, people cannot attain salvation (Rom. 10:9). As Habermas explains, an apologetic method exists solely as a way to present the gospel to unbelievers.<sup>25</sup> Second, there is the well-known reality of “publish or perish.” Professors, seminary instructors, and administrators, of whom there are an estimated 7,200 members (Association of Theological Schools), are compelled to publish in order to retain their higher education positions. Perhaps writing about the resurrection in particular is a sure-fire way to ensure publication acceptance.

### Recommendation for Future Research

Despite the vast amount of literature published about Jesus’ resurrection, there exists a need for more “qualitative” investigations on this topic. Additional research in this area is necessary to clarify, disprove, or verify the suppositions made by detractors and proponents as to Jesus’ bodily resurrection. Also, it would be advantageous if Habermas would publish an up-to-date version of his research.<sup>26</sup>

Benjamin Shaw was a research assistant to and doctoral student under Gary Habermas. He writes in his PhD dissertation a noteworthy comment, stating the need for documentary evidence:

We must avoid the temptation of rhetoric to strengthen our arguments. Similarly, we must avoid the ease of using our perception of what we may “feel” the scholarly landscape to be when making such claims. Moreover, these are also reminders to readers to be on alert for such claims and to look for these claims to be backed up by documentation.<sup>27</sup>

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70 out of 601 Pro-Resurrection book authors (11.65%) are people without degrees in a related field of study and are classified as laypersons.

<sup>25</sup> Habermas, “Evidential Apologetics,” 121.

<sup>26</sup> This recommendation also includes expanding on his earlier work, Habermas, “Mapping the Recent Trend Toward the Bodily Resurrection Appearances,” 78–92.

<sup>27</sup> Shaw, “Philosophy of History,” 76.



In other words, Habermas has an academic obligation to submit his list of 3,400 resurrection texts for peer-review. This is especially true given that Habermas is prone to making questionable claims, such as that if he were to include only liberal Christians, agnostics, and atheists in his collection of “critical scholars,” then he’d still have 95% of scholars who concede his minimal facts.<sup>28</sup> Such a (hyperbolic?) claim needs to be authenticated with actual evidence (not just his word) so others can evaluate whether he has accurately surveyed the sources.

## Conclusion

Gary Habermas’s publications report that he has identified roughly 3,400 resurrection sources. He elaborated they were (1) published from 1975 to 2010; (2) books and journal articles; and (3) in English, French, and German. His research found that a 3:1 ratio (75%) of scholars accepted the empty tomb and that an even higher percentage endorsed other minimal facts about the resurrection. Looking at the data another way, Habermas is saying that at least 25% of authors or scholars reject the empty tomb as a fact. In contrast, research by Alter differs from that of Habermas in several ways. His investigation incorporated (1) exclusively English-language materials; (2) texts at least forty-eight pages long; and (3) books written in the past five centuries.

In 2020, Alter published *A Thematic Access-Oriented Bibliography of Jesus’s Resurrection*. That 602-page text organized approximately 7,000 English-language book sources into twelve main categories and thirty-four subcategories. Chapter One consists of texts that are Pro-Resurrection. Chapter Two comprises texts that are Contra-Resurrection. This article then added twenty-two newly published resurrection texts to the original lists.

For the first time, exhaustive data about the authors of English-language books written on the resurrection has been organized and published. Analysis of the publications identified 735 texts spanning five centuries (from approximately 1500 to 2020).<sup>29</sup> The data revealed 680 Pro-Resurrection books by 601 authors. Additional data for this article (not incorporated from Alter 2020) includes the authors’ nationality, level of education, religious belief (or lack thereof), occupation, scholastic degree, and gender. The data analysis found 204 ministers, 146 priests, 249 seminary personnel, 70 laypersons, and 22 women published on the resurrection. In contrast, 55 contra books, representing only 7.48% of the total 735 books, were published by 42 authors.

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<sup>28</sup> Habermas, “APOL 920,” February 13, 2017.

<sup>29</sup> For the list of books, see Alter, *A Thematic Access-Oriented Bibliography*, 3–46.

A remarkably high proportion of the books written about Jesus' resurrection were by members of the clergy or people linked to seminaries, which means any so-called scholarly consensus on the subject of Jesus' resurrection is wildly inflated due to a biased sample of authors who have a professional and personal interest in the subject matter. No doubt that the same holds true for journal article publications, as well. Pro-Resurrection authors outnumber Contra-Resurrection authors by a factor of about twelve-to-one.

This investigation substantiates assertions that Christians of various denominations write the vast majority of texts published on Jesus' resurrection. This review determined that virtually all of the Pro-Resurrection Christian authors are, in fact, "true believers" with pre-critical and occupational biases in favor of orthodox Christian dogma. A literature review of the sources confirms that many of the authors are apologists, evangelists, ministers, priests, or administrators and professors in theological seminaries and universities. Consequently, the vast majority likely have a vested interest in the outcome of their research, something Habermas himself warns against.<sup>30</sup>

By now, the flaw in the second criterion listed in Habermas's 2005 and 2012 articles should be apparent to the reader. Habermas' numbers merely expose the likelihood of a confirmation bias among credentialed "true believers" who conclude something that they already believed to begin with: Jesus raised from the dead.<sup>31</sup> The data that Habermas has amassed is not proportionately pulled from all relevant subclasses of critical scholarship and is, therefore, unrepresentative of the actual historio-theological landscape. The data Habermas has gathered is not only tainted by virtue of his own professional biases (data gathered by advocacy groups like Christian apologetic institutions

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<sup>30</sup> Habermas once remarked, "Historiography is certainly capable of determining the past. We just must be careful not to read biases into the accounts" (Habermas, "Evidential Apologetics," 95). Not surprisingly, Habermas betrays this sentiment when he insists on maintaining the unfalsifiable nature of his own beliefs. For instance, Habermas has repeatedly remarked that even if the verified bones of Jesus were found, this would still not disprove Jesus' resurrection. Rather, Habermas states that he would simply adopt a "Jedi Jesus" view where the resurrected Christ reappeared in a disembodied form. According to him, this is the most popular view held by "liberals," anyway. He states that if any evidence is presented against Jesus' resurrection, then apologists need "to get our guns out again" and attempt to defeat the evidence (Habermas, "APOL 910-397," September 14, 2015). Indeed, Habermas has openly said that if there was a better hypothesis to the resurrection theory, he would not stop until it was thoroughly destroyed in order to make sure the only remaining hypothesis is the orthodox Christian one (Habermas, "APOL 900," May 26, 2016). This is a confirmation bias in its most transparent form.

<sup>31</sup> Kenneth Boa and Robert Bowman explain, "One's perspective on what is reasonable, factual, and practical is largely determined by the worldview one has already espoused" (Boa and Bowman, 132).

should be immediately suspect<sup>32</sup>), but it is also tainted by virtue of having only been collected from one subgroup (those who have actually published on the resurrection) of the target population (critical scholars).<sup>33</sup> Moreover, those who *have* published on the resurrection did so because they likely have very strong positive opinions about the matter. To claim that the majority of *critical* scholars believe Habermas's minimal facts is simply unwarranted. Habermas indirectly surveyed a disproportionate number of Christian authors who, not surprisingly, were likely "true believers" long before engaging in "critical" research. Habermas' minimal facts strategy implies that authors who have written on the resurrection (according to Habermas's numbers, approximately 3,000 people) somehow represent *all* the different scholars in all the relevant fields of study who would have an informed opinion on Jesus' resurrection. Apologists, theologians, ministers, and seminary professors do not qualify as a representative sample of scholarship, even if the sample size of publications is quite large. Having not actually drawn from relevant representative subclasses, the number of actual *Christian-oriented* publications is of no consequence.

That said, this article does *not* wish to assert that a Christian scholar cannot write an objective and critical text on the topic of Jesus' resurrection. Indeed, a literature review found that several detractors were once Christians, and some were former "believers" who later deconverted. Conversely, a review of the literature shows that some non-Christians and marginal Christians alike have converted or become stronger believers ("more mature in their faith") in Christianity after a deeper inquiry into the subject.

In contrast to the number of Christian authors, only fifty-five texts out of 735 (7.48%) of English-language texts written on Jesus' resurrection are highly critical of the evidence or rejected it outright. Of the forty-two Contra-Resurrection authors, only fourteen have degrees in related areas of study, and twenty-eight lacked degrees in relevant fields. Significantly, this investigation should be considered tentative and used with caution because its sample consists exclusively of English-language texts. Nevertheless, this review should serve as a basis for future research into a so-called scholarly consensus.

At the onset of this article, there was a presentation of a quotation from a short excerpt from a 2019 book review by Glenn Siniscalchi, assistant

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<sup>32</sup> As John Frame correctly remarks, neutrality does not exist for the Christian apologist when examining evidences. To claim otherwise would be to tell a lie since the apologist already presumes the validity of Christianity (Frame, "Presuppositional Apologetics," 217–18).

<sup>33</sup> Considering that numerous publications about Jesus' resurrection appear in exclusively *Christian* periodicals and publishing houses, it is very likely that detractors and nonbelievers have been excluded from publishing their perspective on the subject.

professor of theology at Notre Dame College. Rephrasing his poignant words: “One of the common objections to the reliability of 1 Corinthians 15, the Gospels, and Acts is that they were composed by committed believers whose bias prevented them from telling the truth about Jesus’ resurrection. The weight of this objection is only compounded by the fact that most texts written about the resurrection are perhaps influenced by ecclesiastical presuppositions.”<sup>34</sup>

It is only fitting to conclude this article by quoting the words of New Testament scholar, Craig Keener. In his noteworthy two-volume text, *Miracles: The Credibility of the New Testament*, Keener strikingly echoes Siniscalchi’s words when discussing skeptics’ response to the apologetic claim that a head count of New Testament scholars reveals most of them accept Jesus’ bodily resurrection:

The response seems fair if it primarily questions whether truth can be determined by a head count of scholars: most Christian scholars believe in a supernatural resurrection, whereas most non-Christians deny it. Yet it is unfair if it supposes that an appeal to secular scholars settles the question any more than an appeal to Christian scholars does. Scientific and historical epistemology demands evidence—appeal to authority (such as a head count of scholars) is a different epistemology, and tells us more about reigning philosophic paradigms than about historical facts. Naturally those who believe in the resurrection are (with a few notable exceptions) Christians—why would someone affirm Jesus’ resurrection yet not be counted as a Christian?<sup>35</sup>

Habermas would do well to consider this objection when appealing to popular opinion. In fact, he admits that the fundamental weakness of the minimal facts approach is that it relies on the shifting trends and transitory consensus of current scholarship. The minimal facts approach would not work or would require significant modification if the majority of scholars no longer agree on certain “facts” in the future.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Siniscalchi, “Jewish Scholarship on the Resurrection,” 742–43.

<sup>35</sup> Keener, *Miracles*, 380

<sup>36</sup> Habermas, “APOL 910-397.”

## Appendix

The data relating to Pro-Resurrection sources also revealed that since 1950, an increasing number of texts have been written and published on this topic. A breakdown by the years of publication can be seen in Table 4.

Table 4. Number of Pro-Resurrection texts, by year of publication

<b>Years</b>	<b>Number of Texts Published</b>
2010–May 2020	73
2000–2009	112
1975–1999	161
1950–1974	97
1925–1949	46
1900–1924	75
1850–1899	66
1800–1849	22
1750–1799	8
1700–1749	12
1500–1699	8
Total Number of Pro-Resurrection Texts	680

Similarly, the data of Contra-Resurrection sources has also revealed that an increasing number of texts have been written and published since 1975 on this topic. A breakdown by the years of publication can be seen in Table 5.

Table 5. Number of Contra-Resurrection texts, by year of publication

<b>Years</b>	<b>Number of Texts Published</b>
2010–2020	12
2000–2009	9
1975–1999	16
1950–1974	2
1925–1949	2
1900–1924	5
1850–1899	2
1800–1849	2
1750–1799	1
1700–1749	4
Total Number of Contra-Resurrection Texts	55

### Additional Data Derived from Alter (2020)

Data from additional subcategories in Alter also substantiates the prior findings found in subcategories 1 and 2. A concise summary is in Table 6.

Table 6. Data from additional select subcategories in Alter (2020) partially identified by the LoC

Category	No. of Texts	Category	No. of Texts
Apologetics (texts): Pro (BT1095–1255)	646	Agnostics, Atheists, Detractors, Humanists, Liberal Christians, Rationalists, and Skeptics: Con (BL2700–2790)	254
Miracles and Science: Pro (BT361–367; BT580)	136	Miracles and Science: Con (BL240; BT361–367; BT580)	27
Jesus' Life: Biographies and Historicity of Christ: Pro (BT290–300; BT414)	725	Jesus' Life: Biographies and Historicity of Christ: Con (BT290–300)	68
Jesus' Life: General Works the Person Jesus, the History of the Early Church, and the Shroud of Turin: Pro Resurrection (BT201–205; BS 2400–2600s; BR 120– 165)	438	Jesus' Life: General Works the Person Jesus, the History of the Early Church, and the Shroud of Turin: Con Resurrection (BT201–205; BS 2400– 2600s; BR 120–165)	43
Excerpts from Edited Books: Pro Resurrection (BT1095–1255)	277	Excerpts from Edited Books: Con Resurrection (BL2700–2790)	67
Islamic Interpretations of Jesus' Crucifixion: Pro Resurrection (BP160–172; BT1170)	213	Islamic Interpretations of Jesus' Crucifixion: Con Resurrection (BP161– 173)	86

Jewish Converts: Pro Resurrection (BV620)	24	Jewish Detractors: Con Resurrection (BM590—591; BM648)	87
The Gospel of Mark: Pro (BS2585)	406	The Gospel of Mark: Con	0
The Gospel of Matthew: Pro (BS2555–2575)	390	The Gospel of Matthew: Con	0
The Gospel of Luke: Pro (BS2595; BS2775)	424	The Gospel of Luke: Con	0
The Gospel of John: Pro (BS2615–2616)	434	The Gospel of John: Con	0
The Acts of the Apostles: Pro (BS2625–2626)	327	The Acts of the Apostles: Con (BS2625)	1 (Gerd Lüdemann)
1 Corinthians 15: Pro (BS2640–2765)	306	1 Corinthians 15: Con	0
The Apostles' Creed: Pro (BT990–1040)	203	The Apostles' Creed: Con	0
Doctrines, Dogmatics, and Systematic Theology: Pro (BT19–37; BT77–98; BX1749–1752; BX8000s)	483	Doctrines, Dogmatics, and Systematic Theology: Con	0
Dissertations, Theses, and Papers: Pro	317	Dissertations, Theses, and Papers: Con [NB. This subcategory did exist. The data was gathered by reexamining subcategory 32.	1 (Robert Greg Cavin)
* Total Texts, Not Total Authors	5749		634

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## ABOUT THE AUTHORS

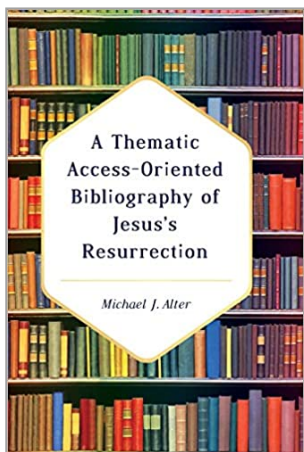
**Michael J. Alter** was a teacher for over forty years in the Miami-Dade County Public School System. He published *A Thematic Access-Oriented Bibliography of Jesus's Resurrection* with Resource Publications (2020). His 602-page text identified approximately 7,000 English-language sources from books on that subject. Five years earlier, he penned *The Resurrection: A Critical Inquiry* (2015) and has assisted in editing several other texts. Alter has also published with Jason Aronson, *Why the Torah Begins with the Letter Beit* (1998) and *What Is The Purpose Of Creation? A Jewish Anthology* (1991). Both books were the main selection of "The Jewish Book Club."

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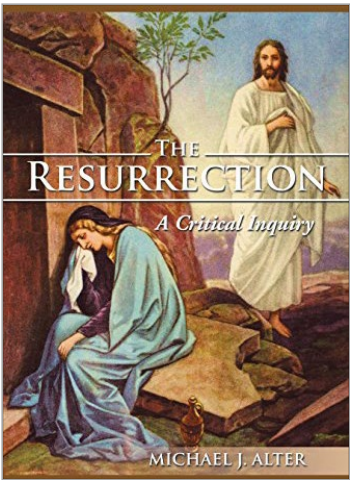
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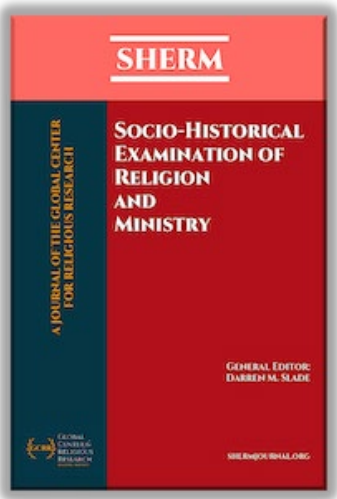
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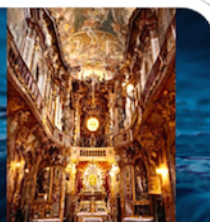




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